

Plant school

Academia/industry partnership boosts training levels for facility operators

A joint industry/academia partnership is helping put better trained operators into oil and gas facilities across Western Canada, combining a wealth of experience already scattered through gas plants and batteries in all three western provinces with recognized operator training at Lloydminster's Lakeland College.

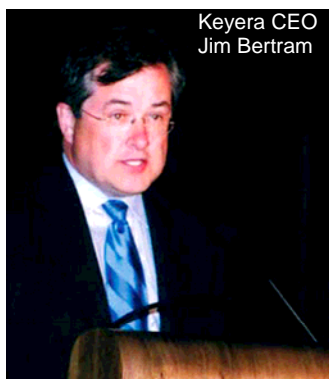
And at a ceremony in Calgary in April, the first fruits of that co-operation emerged, as more than 600 certified operators were recognized for completing the Oil and Gas Operator Certificate Program, offered by Lakeland with the support of a 24-company consortium headed by Keyera Energy.

The program was started in 2002, and is designed to assess an operator's work experience and skills related to a specific occupational profile. There are now 3,000 oil and gas employees enrolled in the program, which is open to employees at any plant, not just those owned and operated by consortium members.

"The program is competency-based, online where possible, skill-profile-oriented and third-party audited," says Tim Tivendale, coordinator of best practice and capability development for Keyera. "It addresses industry-related training and other workplace skills, such as communication, computer literacy and interpersonal relations."

The certification program grew out of Keyera's own internal programs to assess and develop job-related knowledge and skills, Keyera president Jim Bertram said at the certification ceremony. For the most part, he says, the responsibility for ensuring that Keyera's facilities are operated safely and efficiently rests with the personnel on the ground at each plant, who day in and day out "make the hundreds of operational decisions that determine how these plants will operate. Many of them have been doing for a long time, and they're damn good at it."

That kind of folksy operating style may have worked well a decade ago, but as the industry changed, roles and responsibilities at the plant level evolved, and Keyera found itself dependent for long-term success on maintaining top-quality operating personnel.



Keyera CEO
Jim Bertram

"First and foremost, we needed to ensure that our employees were competent to perform the tasks that we were asking them to do," Bertram said. "This is critical to their safety and wellbeing as well as to the safety of their co-workers and the people in the communities around our plants."

Hence the development of an internal system to assess and develop the skills each employee needed to do a particular job. The program began at the plant operations level, and was gradually expanded to capture a wide range of job profiles, and along the way, Keyera's officials came to realize that what they were doing was not unique.

"Across the industry, others were facing the same challenges," he said, noting that it was also becoming clear that everyone's interests would be served if competitive considerations could be set aside and industry co-operation brought to bear on the issue of personnel training and certification.

"We understood that sharing our program with others in our industry was not only the right thing to do, but would enable us to share best practices and thereby strengthen the program."

But co-operating with other oil and gas operators was only the first stage in developing the certification program, which Keyera and the others recognized would be key to ensuring a steady flow of qualified plant personnel.

With strict internal training regimens, Keyera and other operators soon had a highly skilled workforce populated by well-trained people who were very good at what they do. But those skills were recognized only internally: there was no process of certification, no mechanism by which the workers could use that knowledge to open other doors.

"Today, through our partnership with Lakeland College and Alberta Advanced Education, we have opened a new and tremendously exciting new chapter in alternative education," Bertram said. "Today, employees in the oil patch can apply the knowledge that they gain through experience and on-the-job training to obtain an academic certificate. And we're working with Advanced Education to develop a program of studies that, when completed, will allow our workers to obtain a diploma and, with further study, can see them receive an applied degree."

Oil & Gas Operator Certificate Program Consortium

Members of the consortium led by Keyera Energy are:

Accrete	Airbourne Solutions
AltaGas Resources	Anadarko Energy
Archean	Bonavista Energy Trust
Bunch Welding	Burlington Resources
Calvert Energy Services	Canetic Resources Trust
ConocoPhillips	Cordero
Crew Energy	Dominion Exploration
Duke Energy	Highpine Resources
HSE Integrated	Grizzly Resources
Mountain West Inspection	Petrofund Energy Trust
PITS/Enform	Shiningbank Energy Trust
Tarpon Energy Services	Keyera Energy